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NYPIRG Counts Down Ten Steps New York Must Take To Be A Green Leader By Earth Day Step 2: Pick Up New York's Solar Power Slack

(NY) – From now until Earth Day, NYPIRG is counting down ten steps that New York must take to be a national environmental leader. With climate deniers firmly in control of national policies, it will be up to the states to act.

In recent years, New York has unveiled ambitious environmental programs and actions. But, announcements must be backed up by achievements. Step one for New York to go green for Earth Day is to ban the sale of new fossil-fuel powered cars. Step two is addressing New York's weak solar power capacity, aiming to grow the State's solar penetration seven-fold. New York State gets only 1.08% of its electricity from solar. Despite being the fourth largest state, NY ranked 12th in overall installed solar capacity in 2017 (ranking 7th in 2010).

NYPIRG calls on the Governor to develop a master solar plan for New York, with annual targets and benchmarks, which aims to match the solar penetration of leading states such as California, and at least catch up with neighboring states such as Massachusetts (7.75%), or Vermont (10.43%).

New York Solar Power By The Numbers:

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- New York Total Solar Installed: 1,252.9 MW (319.4 MW in 2017)
- NY's National Ranking: 11th (12th in 2017)
- NY State Homes Powered by Solar: 206,000
- NY Solar Jobs: 9,011
- NY Solar Jobs National Job Ranking: 3rd in 2017
- Percentage of NY State's Electricity from Solar: 1.08% in 2017

NY is Falling Behind Neighboring States

- New Jersey: 3.83% in 2016²
- Massachusetts: 7.75% in 2017³
- Vermont: 10.43% in 2017⁴

California Is Leading

15.56% in 2017⁵

Germany and Italy both beat 6%

- Germany 6%⁶
- Italy 6.6%⁷

New York's Solar Policies At A Glance

1. Net-metering: The decision to move away from net-metering for community solar projects was premature, making financing for upfront costs too expensive and pricing low-income communities out.
2. In 2010, New York regulators set a goal of obtaining about 8.5% of the state's electricity from renewable generation, such as solar photovoltaic and solar thermal systems, fuel cells, anaerobic digester systems, and wind.⁸ In 2016, NY received about 3% of its electricity from those sources.⁹
3. The Power New York Act of 2011 directed NYSEERDA to study achieving the goals of 2,500 MW of installed solar capacity operating by 2020 and 5,000 MW operating by 2025 (NY is currently at 1,252.9 MW.)¹⁰

Action Steps:

The Governor must develop within six months a master solar plan for New York, with annual targets and benchmarks. New York should aim to match the solar penetration of leading states such as California (which gets 15.56% of its electricity from solar), and at least catch up with neighboring states such as Massachusetts (7.75%), or Vermont (10.43%). The master plan must also address that electricity costs are lower upstate, making solar more of a challenge.

The Governor must overturn the recent decision to move away from net metering for community solar projects. While the goal of revaluing solar may be worthwhile, the move was premature in light of the limited development of solar in the state at this point. Solar projects save money over time but have upfront costs that usually need to be financed. These financing costs increase when there is price uncertainty. This has become a major roadblock to community solar. It also puts projects out of reach of low-income people by making them too expensive. The state should promote community solar farms by enabling all Community Choice Aggregation programs to contract directly with such farms, as the PSC recently did for Joule Assets, the systems administrator which started the first CCA in Westchester County. The state should also allow for single billing for participating customers.

New York should lead by example by solarizing (or otherwise retrofitting, whatever is most cost-effective) within three years all of its public buildings. It should look to install solar on state-owned property such as the Thruway and closed state facilities.

New York State must also provide more leadership in assisting with the local siting and permitting of solar farms. Local governments often lack prior experience with solar farms and many have enacted moratoriums on their operation while the town grapples with development concerns.

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¹ Solar Energy Industries Association, Solar Spotlight: New York; December 2017 https://www.seia.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Federal_2017Q4_New%20York_3.12.2018.pdf.

² Solar Energy Industries Association, Solar Spotlight: New Jersey; September 2017 https://www.seia.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Federal_2017Q2_New%20Jersey.pdf.

³ Solar Energy Industries Association, State-by-State Map, Massachusetts, 2017, <https://www.seia.org/states-map>.

⁴ Solar Energy Industries Association, State-by-State Map, Vermont, 2017, https://www.seia.org/states-map_2017.

⁵ Solar Energy Industries Association, Solar Spotlight: California; December 2017 <https://www.seia.org/state-solar-policy/california-solar>.

⁶ International Energy Agency, Germany: Energy System Overview, <https://www.iea.org/media/countries/Germany.pdf>.

⁷ International Energy Agency, Energy Policies of IEA Countries: Italy 2016 Review; December 2016 <https://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/EnergiePoliciesofIEACountriesItaly2016Review.pdf>.

⁸ US Energy Information Administration, New York State Profile and Energy Estimates, updated July 20, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=NY>.

⁹ US Energy Information Administration, Net Generation by State by Type of Producer by Energy Source (EIA-906, EIA-920, and EIA-923), https://www.eia.gov/electricity/data/state/-lines_46674-46686.

¹⁰ New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, New York Solar Study, <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/About/Publications/Solar-Study>.